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## GAZA SITUATION REPORT 90

30 April 2015

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21- 28 April | Issue No. 90

## HIGHLIGHTS

- "Last year's war in Gaza can't be known as 'The Third War,'" said the Director of UNRWA Operations in Gaza, Mr. Robert Turner, during a press briefing in Brussels (<http://www.veooz.com/news/7IyHkWa.html>) on 23 April. "It must be remembered as 'The Last War,'" he added. Mr. Turner travelled to Berlin and Brussels to brief German government interlocutors and European Union representatives including the European Council, Commission, Parliament and Member States, warning them of an imminent food and water crisis as well as the rise of intercommunal violence. He also called on would-be donors to fulfil their pledges made at the Cairo Conference for the reconstruction of Gaza. "After the 2012 conflict there was still hope that things would change, that the blockade would be eased, that there would be some kind of result or closure. Now, none of that hope is left," he further explained. What is happening in Gaza today amounts to "statistics of shame," Mr. Turner concluded.
- UNRWA Commissioner-General Pierre Krähenbühl visited Gaza from 24 to 26 April. During his stay he met with representatives of Gaza civil society organizations and visited an UNRWA Collective Centre (CC) where he met with Ms. Suzan El-Dabba, who was recently nominated by UNRWA for the Nansen Refugee Award (<http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/nansen>) for outstanding dedication and service to the displacement cause. Mr. Krähenbühl also attended a celebration held by the UNRWA Local Staff Union in Jabalia in North Gaza and met with Dr. Zakaria Al-Agha, Chairman of the PLO's Refugee Affairs Department, and *the Palestinian Minister of Labour, Mr. Mamoun Abu Shahla*.
- Update on the UNRWA shelter programme
  1. Israel allows most goods into the Gaza Strip except for items it defines as "dual-use" materials which could have a military purpose. Construction materials defined as dual-use are only permitted to enter for approved projects by international organizations and, since mid-October 2014, under the Gaza Reconstruction Mechanism (GRM) (<http://www.unsco.org/Gaza%20Reconstruction%20Mechanism%20Fact%20Sheet%209%20October%202014.pdf>), an agreement between the governments of Israel and Palestine, for private sector use. The GRM, to which UNRWA is not a party, allows for private sector imports, and hence for shelter self-help for large scale reconstruction which was not possible prior to the establishment of the GRM due to the Israeli blockade on Gaza. As outlined in the factsheet, (<http://www.unsco.org/Gaza%20Reconstruction%20Mechanism%20Fact%20Sheet%209%20October%202014.pdf>) the GRM is composed of three

streams: 1. Repair of damaged homes/properties (led by the Government of Palestine); 2. Large scale public and private sector works (led by the Government of Palestine); and 3. United Nations led works (led by the UN).

2. As of 29 April 2015, UNRWA engineers have confirmed 137,729 Palestine refugee houses as impacted during the summer hostilities. This number is lower than the previously announced figure as assessed homes with no damages recorded were finally removed from the list after a database review. Hence to date, 9,161 Palestine refugee houses have been considered totally demolished and 4,939 have suffered severe, 3,769 major and 119,860 minor damages. Since the start of the 2014 emergency shelter response, UNRWA has distributed a total of US\$ 96.8 million (excluding Programme Support Costs) to Palestine refugee families. US\$ 175 million has been pledged in support of UNRWA's emergency shelter programme, for which a total of US\$ 720 million is required. This leaves a current shortfall of US\$ 545 million.
3. For the self-help shelter repair programme, UNRWA relies on the first stream of the GRM (repair of damaged homes/properties or "Shelter Repair Stream"). This stream allows for self-help shelter repair of homes with minor, major and severe damages only. This stream is functioning well but UNRWA currently has insufficient funding to continue the programme. After the announced suspension of the shelter programme in January 2015, UNRWA continues to support families whenever funding becomes available, mainly through savings, reprogramming or receipt of pre-announced pledges. To date, over 60,000 Palestine refugee families – almost half of the caseload – have been able to complete the repair of their damaged homes with assistance provided through UNRWA. During the reporting week, UNRWA was able to pay a total of around US\$ 1.4 million in cash assistance from the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) through KfW Development Bank and the Government of Japan for 388 families to carry out repair works of their severely damaged homes.
4. As for shelter self-help reconstruction, eight months after the announcement of a ceasefire, not a single totally destroyed home has been rebuilt in Gaza. To date, the Agency has only received funding to rebuild 200 of the 9,161 Palestine refugee homes which are assessed to be totally destroyed. Shelter reconstruction under the GRM was initially envisaged to fall under the 2<sup>nd</sup> GRM stream (Large scale public and private sector works), meaning that every single house of the over 9,161 totally destroyed refugee homes would be treated as a separate reconstruction project requiring distinct approvals. Negotiations of a 4<sup>th</sup> stream, a simplified "Residential Stream", to allow for the construction of totally destroyed houses, is still ongoing (including, for example, a standardized unit formula to allow for swift approval). As soon as an agreement is reached, UNRWA will submit the first 200 cases for

reconstruction works funded by Germany for approval. The families have been identified and building permits and approved designs are being prepared.

5. UNRWA also provides rental subsidies to families with uninhabitable homes. Due to the Agency's lack of funding, 704 families still have not received the rental subsidy for the period from September to December 2014; 9,000 refugee families are waiting for the first quarter of 2015 payment and 7,070 families have not received their US\$ 500 reintegration grant to help replace lost household goods.

- The UN Board of Inquiry has released a report regarding the incidents in Gaza during the 2014 summer conflict. The 207-page long report is confidential, but a 27-page long (<http://blog.unwatch.org/wp-content/uploads/Board-of-Inquiry.pdf>)summary was published on 27 April. The UN Board of Inquiry had investigated (<http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=50705#.VT8d8cv9nIU>) seven incidents in which death or injuries occurred at, or damage was done to, UN premises. These incidents involved the loss of 44 Palestinians together with at least 227 injured. Also three incidents involving alleged weapons found in UNRWA schools were investigated. The report found the seven incidents affecting UN facilities used as emergency shelters for civilians were attributable to Israel. Palestinian groups were found responsible for hiding weapons in three UN facilities that were not being used as shelters at the time. The UN inquiry was led by the retired Dutch general Patrick Cammaert and included military and legal experts. In his letter to the Security Council transmitting the report, the Secretary-General noted: (<http://www.un.org/press/en/2015/db150427.doc.htm>) "The agony of Palestinian civilians in Gaza, and the tragic, decades-long predicament they endure there, is reflected in the report of the Board of Inquiry."
- The UN has warned since the end of the summer 2014 hostilities that as long as the underlying causes of the conflict remain unaddressed, simply relying on "quiet for quiet" will lead to more violence in the future. The blockade continues to fuel instability, de-development and conflict, and makes the next escalation just a matter of time. The recent positive changes from Israel with regards to transfers of goods to the West Bank indicate a significant policy alteration vis-à-vis the Gaza Strip, but to date these measures are primarily of a symbolic nature and fall far short of the requirement for a full lifting of the blockade. During the reporting week, on 23 April at 2110hrs, militants in Gaza reportedly fired two rockets towards Israel; one of them exploded in an open area in Sha'ar Hanegev Regional Council, while the other one dropped short and exploded inside Gaza. No injuries or damage were reported. A few hours later, Israeli forces reportedly conducted three air strikes targeting a Hamas military site in Beit Hanoun, northern Gaza. The incident was reported by various media outlets (<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/04/israel-strikes-rocket-fired-gaza-150423221718876.html>). This was the third time this year that a rocket was fired from Gaza towards Israel, but the first that landed inside Israel. On 19 January, a rocket fired towards Israel dropped short and landed inside Gaza

and on 16 February two rockets fired towards Israel again dropped short and landed inside Gaza near the fence. Since the beginning of 2015, Israeli forces have conducted ten ground incursions into Gaza and have fired eight tank shells towards Palestinian areas. During the reporting period, Israeli forces repeatedly opened fire at Palestinian fishermen and farmers.

- UNRWA has successfully continued its outreach to communities and relevant bodies regarding the reform of its Poverty Survey Assessment (PAS). The PAS is a routine process for UNRWA to ensure that food continues to be provided to those who need it most. Outreach target groups include beneficiaries, local human rights groups, popular refugee committees, ministry staff, political factions, UNRWA personnel and community leaders. The training of social workers on the reformed PAS that started on 3 March will conclude on 30 April. Poverty assessment home visits will restart in May 2015. UNRWA will serve all those who are assessed as eligible for food assistance; there is no maximum number of food aid beneficiaries.
- "The most important output from this exercise is to find and discuss the most successful approaches in the management of UNRWA Collective Centres," said Mrs. Ansa Masaud, head of the UNRWA Collective Centres Management Unit (CCMU) at the beginning of a 'lessons learned' retreat held on 26 April for 25 UNRWA staff members in Gaza City. The exercise will enable the Agency to build on effective approaches for its future work in the management of shelters and Collective Centres (CCs). Since the August 2014 ceasefire, UNRWA Gaza's CCMU has worked tirelessly to provide services for internally displaced persons (IDPs) in CCs across the Gaza Strip. As of 28 April, UNRWA is still providing shelter for 5,040 IDPs in nine remaining CCs in Gaza. The Agency plans to close the Rimal Preparatory Girls School CC in Gaza City by 30 April.
- Providing access to quality health services for Palestine Refugees in Gaza remains a priority for UNRWA. As part of the Agency's work to keep its staff's skills and knowledge current, an UNRWA Gaza health team consisting of a Field Nursing Officer, a Deputy Field Nursing Officer and six senior staff nurses participated in a 3-day workshop on contagious and non-communicable diseases held in Amman, Jordan, from 19 to 21 April. The workshop was organized by UNRWA in cooperation with the not-for-profit development organization Microclinic International (<http://microclinics.org/>). Following the workshop, the Gaza team attended the Jordanian Nursing Forum held on 23 and 24 April in Amman. The Field Nursing Officer also participated in a workshop provided by the World Health Organisation on 'The Future of Nursing and Midwifery in the Middle East', held in Amman, on 25 April.

## **GENERAL**

*Operational environment:* Capturing much of the reality in Gaza at the moment, 'as bleak as ever' is the title of a recent article in The Economist (<http://www.economist.com/node/21649498/print>) that describes the situation in the Strip, mentioning the ongoing homeless crisis and states that "Israel's government lets Gazans import only a fraction of the cement they need."

The Palestinian Authority (PA) employee's salary crisis has reportedly improved over the past weeks with the release of almost half a billion US dollars in Palestinian tax revenues that Israel had collected on behalf of the PA but withheld over the past months. From December 2014 to March 2015 the PA had reportedly only been able to pay 60 per cent of the staff salaries above NIS 2000 (approximately US\$ 511); staff with salaries below NIS 2000 had received full payments during that period. The pending payments were issued on 22 April 2015. However, while the banks did not deduct loans from the salaries during the period from December 2014 to March 2015, they now have reportedly deducted loans from the salaries, leaving some employees with very little. Sources indicate that salaries for April 2015 are expected to be paid by the end of April or beginning of May 2015. Pending payments for private sector bills are declared to be processed starting from 26 April 2015.

A number of Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) exploded during the reporting week. On 26 April one detonated in front of a Fatah activist's house and damaged his car. No other injuries were reported. On 21 April an unexploded ordnance (UXO) exploded in Beach Camp and injured three civilians. On the same day an UXO was found while a truck was unloading sand in front of a UN residency building. It was removed by the Explosive Ordnance Disposal police.

During the reporting week, different groups held protests across the Strip, mainly demanding the release of Palestinian prisoners from Israeli jails or the payment of their salaries. Militant groups in Gaza also staged military parades. On 23 April, the Palestinian Wafi Youth held a sit-in in solidarity with Palestinian people in the Yarmouk refugee camp in Syria.

## **UNRWA RESPONSE**

**"THE WAR RUINED MY LIFE AND STOLE MY PEACE, DIGNITY AND STABILITY"**



"It is hard to accept that one classroom will be the place where you and your family are expected to sit, eat, play and sleep for an unknown period of time," said 34-year old Hazar Al Jazar, sitting next to one of her sons on the floor of a classroom in an UNRWA Collective Centre. Gaza. © 2015 UNRWA Photo by Khalil Adwan.

Sitting in a classroom, staffed with only a few kitchen tools, a half-empty shelf and some mattresses spread out on the floor, 34-year old Hazar Abu Jazar recalled the story of her escape during last summer's conflict from her house in the heavily destroyed neighbourhood of Shujaya to an UNRWA Collective Centre in Rimal, Gaza city.

"The night we fled from our house the sky was full of red lights from the extensive shelling. My children were terrified; we heard the sound of the surrounding explosions, we heard the voices of people in the streets and in the destroyed houses asking for help, but we could not do anything. At first, we did not dare to leave our place," Hazar said with a voice still shaken by her memories. "But when the shelling became too much we decided to run and left everything behind. Outside, people were running from all directions. Women were barefooted and some were uncovered; children were crying and dead bodies were lying in the streets," she added.

Hazar, her husband and their six children ultimately reached an UNRWA school that served as a designated emergency shelter for internally displaced persons. They stayed in a classroom together with 45 other members of their extended family for several months.

Living in a crowded classroom was difficult. "It is hard to accept that your whole life and hard work has disappeared in one moment and one classroom will be the place where you and your family are expected to sit, eat, play and sleep for an unknown period of time," Hazar explained.

"However, the shelter and Collective Centre management team was very patient with us and understood our loss and pain; they also engaged a lot with the children. We all felt like a family because all the residents in the shelter shared similar experiences," she said, summarising the feeling of unity found in the CC.

Hazar often dreams about moving back to her old house. Yet when she went to check on it together with her husband she could not recognise her neighbourhood: "On the way we were talking about the refrigerator, washing machine and the TV that we had bought recently, hoping that all this equipment would still be there," the woman recounted. However, when she arrived she realised that was only a dream. "The door of the house was closed as I left it, but when I opened it, there was nothing behind. There was complete emptiness. I remembered our worries about the refrigerator and just started to laugh hysterically, that's all I could do at that time," she said.

"I am tired of living in a classroom; I want my life to back. The war ruined my life, stole my peace, my dignity, and my stability," Hazar said. She and her family are expected to receive transitional shelter cash assistance through UNRWA soon so they can rent a house and resume their life as a normal family again.

## **SUMMARY OF MAJOR INCIDENTS**

During the reporting week, Israeli forces fired towards Palestinians near the fence with Israel or at Palestinian boats on a daily basis. On 26 April Israeli forces injured one Palestinian after they opened fire towards Beit Hanoun in northern Gaza. On 27 April Egyptian patrol boats opened fire towards Palestinian boats, forcing them ashore.

On 21 April, militants fired one test rocket towards the sea and on 23 April an additional five were fired. On 23 April, militants also fired two rockets towards Israel; one of them dropped short and landed in Gaza areas and the other one landed in open area in Sha'ar Hanegev Regional Council. On the same day, Israeli forces conducted three air strikes allegedly targeting a Hamas military site in Beit Hanoun, northern Gaza. On 24 April, militants in Gaza fired one test rocket towards the sea. On 27 April, militants fired two test rockets towards the sea.

On 21 April, one Israeli tank and four bulldozers entered approximately 150 metres into Gaza southeast of Maghazi Camp in the Gaza Middle Area and conducted a clearing operation.

## **FUNDING NEEDS**

US\$ 175 million has been pledged in support of UNRWA's emergency shelter programme, for which a total of US\$ 720 million is required. This leaves a current shortfall of US\$ 545 million.

As presented in UNRWA's oPt Emergency Appeal, the Agency is seeking USD 366.6 million for its 2015 emergency operations in Gaza, including USD 127 million for emergency shelter, repair and collective centre management, USD 105.6 million for emergency food assistance, and USD 68.6 million for emergency cash-for-work. More information can be found here

([http://www.unrwa.org/sites/default/files/2014\\_opt\\_emergency\\_appeal\\_english.pdf](http://www.unrwa.org/sites/default/files/2014_opt_emergency_appeal_english.pdf))  
(PDF).

## **CROSSINGS**

- The Rafah Crossing remained closed from 21 to 28 April.
- The Erez crossing was open for National ID holders (humanitarian cases, medical cases, merchants and UN staff) and for international staff on 21 April and on 26 and 27 April. On 22 April, it was opened only for Palestinians who returned to Gaza. On 24 April, Erez crossing was open for pedestrians only. It was closed on 23 April due to Israeli holidays. It was also closed on 25 April.
- Kerem Shalom was open between 21 to 23 April and 26 to 28 April. It was closed on 24 and 25 April.

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